

Vermont's Congressional Delegation – Senator Patrick Leahy (D), Senator Bernie Sanders (I) and Representative Peter Welch (D) – Thursday announced a \$7.4 million federal loan for electric power grid improvements, including new "smart meter" components, in Washington, Orange and Caledonia Counties. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development Electric Program loan to Washington Electric Cooperative of East Montpelier will fund construction of 15 miles of new distribution line, improvements to 28 miles of existing power lines, and other infrastructure changes to improve service to the Co-op's members.

Washington Electric Cooperative supplies electricity to residents and businesses in 41 rural communities and harnesses most of its power from renewable energy sources, including a landfill methane facility in Coventry, Vt., which will be open for tours on Saturday, Oct. 22.

Leahy said, "Rural electric cooperatives are building much of the foundation for a smarter electric grid to better serve Vermonters. I am delighted that USDA is helping WEC to meet the challenges of deploying our smart grid and improving power distribution in Vermont. These crucial steps will improve service and reliability and help control customers' costs."

Sanders said: "This is great news for Washington County. Smart grid technology can help consumers save energy and save money, and also improves outage response which is critical for rural electric customers in Vermont. This new opportunity will help Vermont continue to lead the nation in energy efficiency."

"This is good news for Vermont," Welch said. "Building a smarter electric grid is common sense. It will allow utilities to better serve their customers. And it will help Vermonters make more informed decisions about how to use energy more efficiently and cost effectively."

Avram Patt, WEC's General Manager. said, " USDA has been the Co-op's principle lender since the Rural Electrification Administration first helped us bring power to unserved areas in 1939. They continue to play a critical role in helping us maintain and improve our system, and in bringing new technology to the most rural utility territory in Vermont.

About \$1 million from the loan will support WEC's installation of "smart meters" as part of

eEnergy Vermont , the state's blueprint for deploying smart grid technology. The smart grid project was launched with a \$69 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act federal grant in 2009. The smart grid project has helped Vermont's rural communities by creating jobs, improving power quality and promoting energy conservation through detailed energy use data.